

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 6, 2021

The Honorable David S. Ferriero
Archivist of the United States
The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration
8601 Adelphi Road
College Park, MD 20740

Dear Archivist Ferriero,

We write to express our continued concern with the records request backlog at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC). The NPRC serves as the “repository of millions of military personnel, health, and medical records of discharged and deceased veterans of all services.”¹ Veterans and their families may need access to these records to provide evidence that may substantiate a VA claim or overturn a prior decision on VA benefits and services; apply for State benefits; update their medical history, etc. The backlog of requests raises concerns about the government’s ability to care for those who honorably served in a timely manner. According to the National Archives and Records Administration’s (NARA’s) own reporting, in March 2021 there was a backlog of almost 500,000 records requests.² That is unacceptable.

According to media reports, the records backlog related to the COVID-19 pandemic “may be far worse than anyone realized, leaving hundreds of thousands of veteran families without access to benefits.”³ NPRC sent its employees home in March 2020 because of the pandemic and most records are not accessible remotely.⁴ This pause in NPRC work flow has resulted in some veterans waiting over a year for their records.⁵ The records that veterans are unable to obtain may impact access to, “benefit payments,... veterans’ facilities and homeless shelters, as well as burials in veterans’ cemeteries,” among others.⁶

Some families of veterans have waited weeks to bury their loved ones and elderly dependents have waited long periods of time to receive a decision on their claim for VA Aid and Attendance benefits.⁷ Moreover, veterans may need a copy of their DD Form 214 to prove they

¹ The Nat’l Archives, Nat’l Personnel Records Center, *Military Personnel Records*, available at <https://www.archives.gov/personnel-records-center/military-personnel>.

² See The Nat’l Archives, Nat’l Personnel Records Center, Press Release, *National Personnel Records Center Prepares for Expansion of Onsite Workforce*, Mar. 8, 2021, available at <https://www.archives.gov/press/press-releases/2021/nr21-30>.

³ Noah Pransky, *Veterans Across U.S. Can’t Access Benefits Because Key Agency Hasn’t Returned to Work*, NBCLX, Mar. 16, 2021, available at https://www.lx.com/politics/veterans-across-u-s-cant-access-benefits-because-key-agency-hasnt-returned-to-work/32884/?_osource=sm_npd_nbc_lx_eml_gen.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

received an honorable discharge for employment purposes, such as hiring requirements for certain law enforcement occupations. It is troubling that the government is failing those who sacrificed for the country. It is inexcusable that we are now unable to even provide them with paperwork documenting their service.

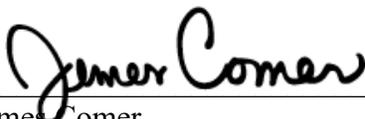
On March 31, 2021, you wrote to congressional leaders to highlight efforts you have taken to increase the productivity at the NPRC, including offering vaccinations to staff and the decision to bring 25 percent of the staff back to the office.⁸ While this update was helpful and appreciated, questions remain about NPRC's lack of planning that led to a records request backlog of nearly 500,000 during the pandemic. It is also unclear what the current wait time is for veterans requesting records, how NPRC prioritizes requests from VA and veterans, how NPRC is spending the emergency funding provided by Congress, how long it may take to ensure there is not an extensive backlog, and what plans are in place to get more employees back in the office given the inability to process requests remotely.

As you may know, the Committee on Oversight and Reform has primary legislative jurisdiction over NARA and is the oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives with broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. The Committee on Veterans' Affairs is the oversight committee over veterans' matters including compensation, burial, and transition to civilian life.

As Members of the respective committees, and in order for us to better understand what steps NARA is taking to ensure all veterans and their families have the ability to obtain the information to which they are entitled, we request that you brief us on your plan to remediate the backlog and address the questions raised above. Please make arrangements to schedule this briefing with Republican staff no later than May 13, 2021. To schedule the briefing, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5074.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this matter.

Sincerely,



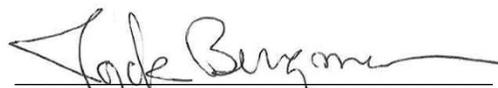
James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

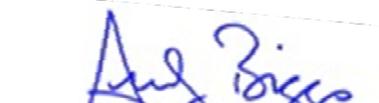


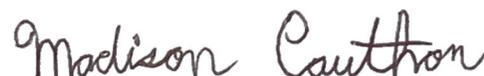
Mike Bost
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

⁸ Letter from David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the U.S., the Nat'l Archives, to James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Gov't Reform., et al., (Mar. 31, 2021).

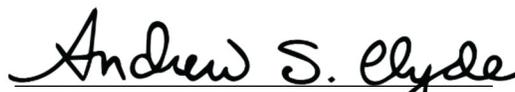

Jim Banks
Member of Congress

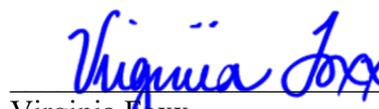

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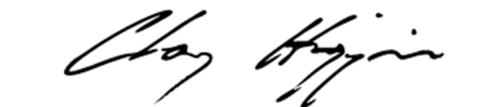

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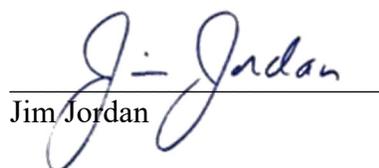

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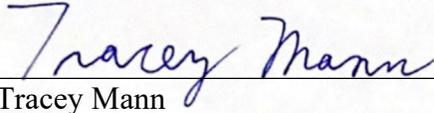


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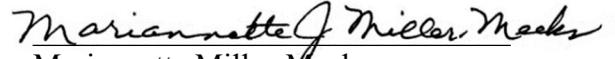
Member of Congress



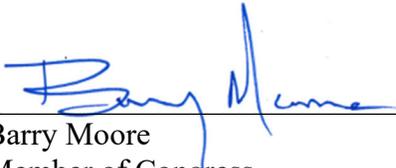
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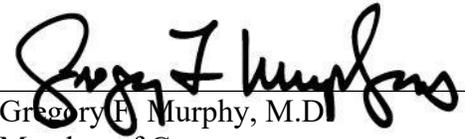
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Member of Congress



Barry Moore
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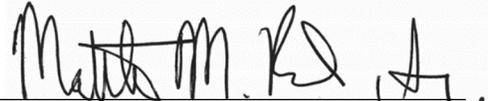
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Member of Congress



Ralph Norman
Member of Congress



Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen
Member of Congress



Matthew M. Rosendale, Sr.
Member of Congress



Chip Roy
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney, Chairwoman
House Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Mark Takano, Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Scott Levins, Director
National Personnel Records Center